<u>**Alliance District Application Process**</u>

Q: How does this process relate to the District Improvement process that some district have been undergoing?
A: Districts should draw from aspects of their District Improvement Plans to the extent that they show particular promise and progress. Deviations from existing District Improvement Plans will also be considered. Specific district questions should be discussed in more detail with the technical assistance teams.

Q: Are new key initiatives counted differently than existing key initiatives?
A: The application asks for information on existing reform initiatives to show a full picture of a district's overall strategy. Existing reforms may be expanded using Alliance District funds. A substantial majority of Alliance District funds must be used for new reform initiatives or for expanding existing reform initiatives. Existing initiatives that the district does not plan to expand should also be included in the plan; however, if the district proposes allocating Alliance District funds towards that existing initiative, it will not count towards the substantial majority requirement.

Q: What process will CSDE use to evaluate the Alliance District applications?
A: The applications will be evaluated through an iterative process. The review committee will consider proposed uses of the Alliance District funds within the context of the district's overall strategy for reform. Interim feedback will be available throughout the application process, and more comprehensive feedback will be provided once a complete application is submitted. Districts are encouraged to meet with members of the technical assistance teams and to submit applications by the preliminary July 13th deadline.

Q: Will the technical assistance teams take part in the evaluation of the Alliance District Plans?
A: Individuals from the technical assistance teams will be part of the review process.

Q: Will the plans be finalized before school starts?
A: The Department's goal is for plans to be given final approval before the beginning of the school year, provided they meet the CSDE's review standards as set out in the application. Districts are encouraged to submit completed plans by the early application deadline of July 13, 2012.

Q: How should the excerpt from the Windham document that was distributed at the June 11th meeting be used?
A: The excerpt from the Windham document was distributed to serve as an exemplary version of how a district could present a detailed list of objectives and implementation steps based on a single key initiative. The full Windham document was produced following an extensive, multi-month planning process.

Q: Can districts propose extended learning time for high schools (as opposed to middle schools) as a key initiative?

A: Yes, a district may identify extended learning time at the high school level as a key initiative. The National Center on Time & Learning, the organization providing the extended time competitive opportunity, has focused its efforts on the middle grades because it has found extended time to have the greatest impact at this level. This does not preclude proposals from using Alliance District funds to extend time in high schools if the application justifies this initiative by demonstrating why it will lead to increased student performance.

<u>**Accountability Metrics**</u>

Q: How is the District Performance Index (DPI) calculated?
A: The Alliance Districts were designated based on a one-time calculation of DPI for 2010-11. The CSDE may revise the method of calculating the DPI to ensure that it is aligned with the SPI in the future.

Q: How is the School Performance Index (SPI) calculated?
A: The SPI is a component of the new measurement and accountability system pursuant to Connecticut's approved No Child Left Behind waiver. The SPI includes student performance in all tested grades (3-8, 10) and subjects (reading, math, writing, science), and it captures achievement at all levels (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, Goal, and Advanced).

Q: How are subgroups factored into the accountability system?
A: Subgroup SPIs are calculated in the same manner as the SPI, but only students from individual subgroups are included. The performance of the following subgroups is provided in the attached document: students with disabilities (SWD), English language learners (ELL), students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (F/R), Black students (Blk), and Hispanic students (Hisp). Subgroups are considered if they include 20 or more students.

Students who "exit" the students with disabilities subgroup or the English language learners subgroup are included in the calculations for those subgroups for two years after they exit. Their scores are included in the subgroup SPIs even though they are no longer identified. In doing so, the continued progress of these students counts toward the progress of the entire subgroups.

How is the four-year cohort graduation rate calculated?
To calculate the 4-year cohort graduation rate, the Connecticut Department of Education (CSDE) tracks a cohort of students from 9th grade through high school and then divides the number of students who graduate within four years by the total number in the cohort. In other words the rate provides the percentage of the cohort that graduates in 4 years or fewer. For example, the formula for the 2011 cohort is:

# of students in cohort who graduate in 4 years or fewer: [# of 1st time entering 9th graders in 2007–08] − transfers out + transfers in

Q: Does the new accountability system incorporate a growth model?
A: Connecticut's new accountability system does not incorporate a cohort growth metric yet; however, the approved NCLB waiver states our intent to explore incorporating a vertical scale growth component in the 2013-14 school year. The current measurement and classification system uses the School Performance Index as the primary metric. This index captures student progress across performance bands in a more comprehensive manner than the accountability system under No Child Left Behind, which only measures percent proficient. The SPI will be calculated using three years of data (2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12) and will serve as the baseline that will be used to set individualized school performance targets for the 2012-13 school year.

Q: How does the MAS special education assessment figure into the SPI calculation?
A: Students participating in the CMT/CAPT MAS or the Skills Checklist will be included in the SPI, DPI, and CPI. Students who score at the Independent level on the Skills Checklist will be factored into the SPI as 1.0, students who score at the Proficient

Skills Checklist (1%)	MAS (2%)	SPI Value
Basic	Basic	0.33
Proficient	Proficient	0.67
Independent	Goal	1.0

level will be assigned 0.67, and the students who score Basic will be assigned 0.33. On the MAS, students scoring at the Goal level will be factored into the SPI as 1.0, students who score at the Proficient level will be assigned 0.67, and the students who score Basic will be assigned 0.33.

Q: What is the state average for the SPI?
A: The Connecticut Performance Index (CPI) is a metric the CSDE uses to capture performance on the CMT and the CAPT. The CPIs are calculated in the same manner as the SPI, but include all tested students in the state.

	2011 CPI	State Target CPI
CAPT	**72.1**	**88**
CMT	**77.1**	**88**

School Classification/Tiering

Q: How are Turnaround Schools identified?
A: Turnaround schools were selected either because they have already received a School Improvement Grant (SIG) and are currently undergoing an intervention or because they are among the lowest 5% of Title I schools as measured by the School Performance Index.

Q: How are Focus Schools identified?
A: Focus Schools were selected, pursuant to our approved NCLB waiver, because they have one or more subgroups of students that are among the lowest performing in the state (as measured by the School Performance Index). The subgroups considered were the high needs subgroup (which is composed of English language learners, students with disabilities, and students eligible for free and reduced price lunch), students who are Black, and students who are Hispanic. Subgroups were considered if the school has 20 or more students in the subgroup. High schools were also selected if they have a 4-year cohort graduation rate below 60%. The reason for each school's selection is noted next to each school (i.e., the subgroup with low performance in the given school is noted).

Q: How are Review Schools identified?
A: These schools were selected because their School Performance Index for the "all students" group is lower than 64. This means that, on average, students are performing below the Proficient level on state assessments. This list is preliminary and is based only on 2010-11 data. It will be updated in August when 2011-12 data become available.

Q: What data should districts use to tier their schools?
A: Districts are encouraged to use their internal data on school performance, progress, or a combination of the two to place schools into the most appropriate tier. The CSDE also suggests incorporating the SPI and four-year cohort graduation rates into their tiering system so that their classification is aligned with the state classification system, which will take full effect at the end of the 2012-13 school year.

If the CSDE identified any of the district's schools as Turnaround, Focus, or Review, these schools must be included in the "Lower Tier" category. The district is, however, welcome to include more schools in this tier. If the CSDE did not identify any of the district's schools as Turnaround, Focus, or Review, then the district may use its own judgment to determine whether any schools should be classified in this tier.

Even if a district's schools have similar performance as measured by the SPI, districts may use other factors – potentially including graduation rates, growth, progress over time, and subgroup performance – to tier schools and develop differentiated strategies for support and intervention.

Q: Will the schools not identified as Turnaround, Focus, or Review be classified by the CSDE?

A: The CSDE will provide more information about the other schools at an informational session to be scheduled this summer. But you should plan to tier these schools based on your own data for your Alliance District application.

<u>**School Interventions**</u>

Q: What is the district required to do to intervene in Turnaround Schools as part of its Alliance District Application?
A: The CSDE will be in contact with your district about interventions in these schools. The district is not required to submit redesign plans for these schools as part of its Alliance District application.

Q: What is the district required to do to intervene in Focus Schools as part of its Alliance District Application?
A: As a condition of Connecticut's NCLB waiver, redesign plans must be in place and operational at Focus schools in the 2012-13 school year. Districts must provide evidence that they have engaged in a process of strategic redesign and targeted intervention. These plans must meet the requirements outlined in the Alliance District application.

Q: What is the district required to do to intervene in Review Schools as part of its Alliance District Application?
A: Review Schools must receive targeted interventions in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. Districts must select a subset of these schools (at least half) to begin interventions in 2013-14. The remainder of the schools must receive interventions in 2014-15. In the Alliance District application, districts must provide an explanation of the process they will engage in during the 2012-13 school year to support schools as they diagnose and plan for the interventions that will be implemented in the following year. The Alliance District application does not require a plan for the school-specific interventions themselves, as these will be developed over the course of the next year.

Q: Can districts intervene in schools not designated as Focus Schools in the 2012-13 school year?
A: Yes, districts are free to intervene in any schools, regardless of whether they have been identified as Focus Schools. However, districts are only required to intervene in federally-designated Focus Schools. Districts may, but are not required to, use the Alliance District funds to intervene in Focus Schools.

Q: Do schools designated as Focus School have any additional staffing flexibility?
A: A school's designation as a Focus School does not alter agreements concerning staffing.

Q: If the incorporation of the 2011-12 data results in more schools being classified as Review schools, then will districts need to add schools to their Phase 2 process for intervention?
A: It is possible that when 2011-12 assessment data is averaged with preliminary data, some schools on the cusp will be reclassified. If more schools in your district are classified as Review Schools, then your district will be required to include these schools

as part of your Phase 2 or Phase 3 intervention process. Resdesign plans for these additional schools would then be included in your district's 2013 or 2014 Alliance District Applications.

Funding:

Q: The NCLB waiver enables districts to use the 20% of Title I funds that were previously reserved for Supplemental Education Services (SES) and Public School Choice for other purposes. What can we use it for?
A: The flexibility relieves a district from the requirement to spend an amount equal to 20% of its Title I, Part A allocation on choice-related transportation and SES. A district has the flexibility to spend these funds on any activity allowable under Title I, Part A that is designed to improve student achievement or support teacher and leader effectiveness, including to support the implementation of interventions in Turnaround and Focus schools; to provide high-quality expanded learning time in those schools; to implement other activities identified by the State's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system; or to carry out other strategies to help students succeed, such as public school choice or SES. Although a district is not required to spend these funds on particular activities, districts must ensure sufficient support for implementation of interventions in Turnaround schools, Focus schools, and other Title I schools identified under the SEA's differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system by leveraging the funds it would otherwise be obligated to spend for choice-related transportation and SES.

Q: Will the Alliance District designations be revisited next year?
A: Any district that is currently designated as an Alliance District will remain an Alliance District for five years.

Q: Can funds be carried over from year to year? Will there be additional funding in years two through five?
A: Districts can carry over unused funds. Certain interventions, like school redesign, may be best implemented by carrying over funds until a later year. The CSDE anticipates that, subject to legislative appropriations, the Alliance Districts will receive the same level of funding for each of the five years.

Q: Is there any relationship between Title I funding and Alliance District funding?
A: There is no relationship between Title I funds and Alliance District funds.

Q: Are districts allowed to allocate a portion of their Alliance District funds to administrative costs?
A: Administrative costs directly related to the implementation of the district's reform strategy – such as funds to pay the salaries of the necessary personnel that will administer the proposed initiatives – are eligible costs that will be included in the substantial majority of the Alliance budget. However, allocations for strictly administrative costs unrelated to new or expanded existing reform initiatives will not be included in the substantial majority.